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THE PLACE OF THE COMMISSION IN CHILD WELFARE WORK

By ELVA L. BASCOM, *In Charge of Library Coöperation, Children's Bureau, U. S. Department of Labor*

If anyone needs to be convinced of the value of an active library commission, he has only to conduct a country-wide campaign. In organizing such a campaign one is at a loss to know to whom to turn for the information that is needed where there is no commission. In carrying it on, the leader finds himself or herself depending more and more on the commission workers to infuse into the work an interest that only personal conference and first-hand enthusiasm can engender.

As planned, the library campaign of the Children's Bureau was to be carried out in coöperation with a state agent, in the states having commissions able to furnish such an agent. This policy seemed wise because the campaign was expected to be only an entering wedge. Whether or not permanent results were obtained would depend as much on the work carried on after the campaign was over as during its few months of existence. Hence the desirability of securing the interest and coöperation of the one official body in the state that was in a position to continue the work, or any part of it.

Most of the commissions showed a real interest in the plan, many were enthusiastic, and the letters sent to their libraries urging their attention to it were greatly appreciated. But owing to arrears in commission offices caused by war work, and to a depleted staff in several cases, my suggestion that all distribution of material be made directly to the libraries was welcomed. This seems to me a very obvious labor and time-saving measure. In states having no commission, or in which the commission was unable to furnish an agent, all the work was done directly with the libraries.

The first material distributed contained two "come-backs." A study of these returns, which are still coming in, conclusively shows that the libraries which have

had the advantage of the advice and assistance of commission workers respond more promptly and enthusiastically to offers of assistance than those that have struggled on unassisted. The ten states from which the largest number of replies have been received are all commission states, mostly those that are ranked as the strongest; the ten returning the fewest replies are states without commissions, with the exception of three, which have an organization but are able to do little work.

There is no method by which the coöperative work which the bureau has been able only to start, can be continued where there is no commission. The more popular of the bureau's publications and occasional circulars will be designated for sending to all libraries, for which a library mailing list has been established, but we all know how little this will mean in many libraries—only a few more pamphlets to put through the necessary routine in order to file them away in pamphlet boxes.

What happens in a library when a demand comes from a student, a teacher, a parent-teacher's association, a mothers' club, a civic or home economics section of a general club, for material on the nutrition of the child, the need of clinics or medical inspection in schools, the question of the child in industry, the problem of the backward or defective child? Those who belong to commissions that furnish material to their libraries know very well what happens! It is difficult to imagine how these needs are supplied in libraries having no commission to turn to. Similarly, any field visitor can tell what happens when a librarian becomes convinced that she needs to build up her own collection on a subject. And if the visitor does not always know the bibliography of that subject well enough to give final advice, she knows to whom to turn for assistance. What do the untrained librarians in

states having no commissions do when they want to buy the best book, or the three best books, on a subject? These matters of first selection and elimination, and the final fitting of books to community, are difficult enough when the subject is one that is fairly definite, like an English literature text, a French dictionary, or a book on birds or flowers; but in subjects which are constantly subjected to scientific research and in which important discoveries or decisions are frequently being made, selection is a much more difficult matter, and carries with it a serious responsibility which comparatively few librarians seem as yet to realize.

The state library commission has a vantage point in the promotion of any work affecting community life which is not possessed by any other agency. The war has shown us what the Government can do in reaching and influencing communities. Its defects of administration and its wastefulness were largely due to the haste with which the work had to be organized, but with the best sort of organization such long-range work must necessarily lose much of its effectiveness. A few sentences spoken with conviction by a commission worker who utilizes a personal knowledge of the librarian's ability in modifying the enthusiasm of the central officer, to whom his subject is liable to loom so large that everything else dwindles beside it, are more sure to gain results than all the printed eloquence issued from Washington.

The field visitor of the library commission knows the libraries of her state as no one else does. She is the surest medium by which can be continued whatever seems desirable of the various Government campaigns, subject, of course, to the sanction and coöperation of her chief. Her position is strategic; she marks the effect of a campaign on the library and librarian; she can gauge its measure of success—whether, if incomplete, it should be continued, enlarged or dropped. She assists the librarian in her selection of material for exhibit, for distribution, and for buying for

the shelves; she adds to the librarian's knowledge of the agencies that she can coöperate with, and sometimes can furnish the valuable knowledge as to which can be coöperated with and which cannot. She can detect to what degree the regular work is neglected in order to carry on this extra work, and suggest readjustments.

The field visitor is, or can be, a powerful agent for social reform work. Any person who has a message worthy the attention of the libraries of the country should get the ear of these visitors and, if there were as many of them in the states as there should be, the most important part of their work would be done. But, unfortunately, they are a comparatively small group, and it is doubtful if the profession as a whole appreciates their services.

Whether or not the commission has special field workers, the members of the staff should have complete knowledge of any coöperative work that the libraries of the state are asked to undertake. This is more true of the Children's Bureau campaign like mine than of those campaigns in which the libraries were used largely as a means of reaching the people with the information the federal office furnished. Permanent improvement in the conditions of child-life can not be brought about in that way. It is a personal and community task, in which the federal government can help only to a limited extent. For the individual and the various community groups, whether working for the children in their own homes or for mothers and children in general, the library's function is that of a lever, its source of power being the written experience of the trained men and women who are saving mothers and children in other communities or who have studied the many problems of child welfare as they have affected other individuals and groups. No distant person or agency can perform for the libraries the task of building up this collection, they can only suggest material and furnish general principles. In little libraries with small appropriations, a good collection may not be built up in a

year or even two. Here is where the nurturing care of the commission is almost a necessity. Who does not know the young librarian whose intentions in any line are the best this summer, but who by next summer will have found a new enthusiasm, the interest in last year's totally gone? Even if visits are necessarily at long intervals, much can be, and is, in many states, accomplished by a correspondence in which a spirit of friendliness and helpfulness is happily combined with an attitude of "I expect the best of you; are you continuing the good work we began at my last visit?"

Since some libraries will proceed no further in their child welfare work than the conception of it which the commission furnishes them, it is important that the members of the commission staff should be convinced of its worth and of its importance in their state. Meetings of the commission staff are usually too infrequent and too crowded to permit of the presentation of special subjects, but the attention of its members could very quickly be called to the few pamphlets which furnish a fairly adequate survey and which present the need for community work. It is not so easy to furnish the data showing the conditions in the state. The Children's Bureau has recently prepared a bulletin which tabulates the laws governing child labor in all the states but it does not name the industries nor show how many of the children in each state are employed. The only sure source of the statistics of infant and maternal mortality of a state is the Census Bureau, which is very obliging about furnishing them. In some states these figures are available from the state health department, as are also the comparative figures for the larger cities. For example, during the baby week campaign in Wisconsin, we knew which town had the greatest number of babies dying yearly and also the reasons why; we knew why another city lost the fewest babies; we never did find out why one of the richest agricultural counties had the worst record

in the state, despite a Children's Bureau survey.

If every commission contained one member who was interested in child welfare work in the state, there are very many important ways in which he or she could help the librarians, who, as many have written to me, want to do all they can but don't know what to do. Many of the boards and agencies with which the libraries can coöperate or which can help the libraries, are of state origin and have headquarters in the capital. Not only the publications dealing with children which they issue are of value in libraries; more valuable often is the information the librarian can give to other people as to what they can do. What the state offers for the backward, the defective, the delinquent child; how laws can be enforced to change a laboring child into a school child; whether or not this mother is eligible for a pension; whether a boy over fourteen can be held at work until nine or ten o'clock p. m.—how many librarians know? A woman may inquire casually at the desk if the librarian has any book which tells how to get a public health nurse; if she hasn't, the half-awakened interest may die, and no nurse be obtained. But if the librarian replies, "I will write to the commission and they will surely know of something," and if the commission member who receives the letter knows where to turn to find the person who will follow up that interest, a nurse may be obtained, a few more mothers and babies may be saved, fewer children may have measles or scarlet fever and so fewer physical defects, and a few promising young people may be saved from tuberculosis. Surely such work is worth the little it costs.

The printed bulletin of the commission is too obvious a tool to need mention. Material for it should be chosen, in most states, primarily to arouse interest in child welfare work; secondarily, to furnish any information the commission has to impart, such as the improved record of the state over last year's; the banner city or county in mortality statistics or work for

children; a bit of good publicity in a library; notices of new books and pamphlets; report of a new development or piece of work in a state department, etc. The libraries should not be allowed to forget that the commission can supply books and pamphlets, singly or in groups, as needed, nor that charts and exhibit material can be borrowed from the health department, the board of education, the university, etc. As these collections are added to, a notice should be inserted in the bulletin.

Any organized attempt to better conditions in the state should have not only the good will of the commission but active support. The most obvious examples are the baby week campaigns, which gave some commissions an excellent opportunity to show their value both to libraries and to communities having no libraries. Similar work has been done in connection with the child welfare committees who have been carrying on the Children's Year work; and there is no doubt that such work will be continued under some auspices owing to the enthusiasm of the women of these committees, who feel, according to their reports, that they have only made a start.

The traveling libraries must not be forgotten. Should a group of fifty or a hundred or even twenty-five books be sent to a community having no library without the welfare of the children being represented? I think not. Parents form a considerable proportion of any normal community, and is there any subject in which there is more need of help in the isolated village, where doctors and nurses, if they are available at all, are often inaccessible, where good dentists are a rarity, and malnutrition flourishes in the midst of the most nourishing food that a child can have? It is in the country districts, too, that some of the greatest evils of child labor flourish, since the laws restricting the labor of children do not include agricultural pursuits and only the school attendance officer has the authority to drag the children out of the fields, and even this authority is nullified by exemptions.

The high percentage of illiteracy found in the regions where children work on farms and in big-crop fields is a shameful testimony to the laxness of law and officer alike.

Not all the subjects that are important to country children are presented in simply enough written books for traveling library uses, but they are gradually appearing. Besides a book or two on infant and child care, let us include some that show what education does for a child, why he needs recreation, what the country has to offer him for his life work, why he should aim to be a good citizen, what is essential to clean, healthy living, etc. We have many good books for parents, teachers, children and young people on these really vital subjects, and most of them cost very little. Shall we not make a sacrifice somewhere else in order to give them a reading where it will do the most good? The routine of creating an army has forced a realization such as we have never had before of what our young people have suffered in the way of physical defect, narrowness of life and thought, and handicapped careers.

The public library is no longer just a library, except where the call to arms caught one that was so inanimate that not even the great tide of war preparation caused a ripple in the routine of its calm existence. It has become a center of community activity, an agency of reform, a counselor to people who knew it not before the clouds of war descended. To be a "guide, philosopher and friend" to this new library is the privilege of the commission. It cannot lag behind if it does not wish to lose its influence and its usefulness. The soldiers will, except for a mere handful, soon be fitted into civilian life again, and the many movements organized for their benefit will have served their usefulness and disappeared. The mother, the baby, the pre-school child, and the child in school and in industry will still be with us, shorn of none of the vexing problems that existed before the war overshadowed them. We have been star-

tled into a new conception of the meaning of life, death, heroism, service, and noblesse oblige. There are many signs that we shall not lapse back into the old grooves, but shall readjust our purposes and performance to harmonize with the new valuations the war has produced. If this shall be true, the constructive forces

of the nation—of which the library is surely one—will duplicate the energy and enthusiasm with which it is welcoming home its soldiers, in working for better conditions for their children, that they may carry into manhood and womanhood the strength and bravery which they have inherited.

GETTING BOOKS TO FARMERS IN CALIFORNIA

BY MILTON J. FERGUSON, *Librarian, California State Library*

With the announcement in 1849 of the discovery of gold in California a great tide of emigrants set their faces westward. They went on horseback, in ox-drawn wagons, on foot, around the Horn, across the Isthmus; they went in great companies and in small groups. Eagerly, yearningly they pushed onward over boundless plains, through lofty, rugged and unmapped mountains, through forest and across desert. They were all classes, all creeds, men of good repute and men of ill. They were alike in buoyant energy, willingness to endure hardships in order to arrive soon and in confidence of ultimate success. The suffering, the weary dogged plodding of thousands finally wore trails and the trails became roads which men could travel with some assurance of reaching the journey's end. But whatever the business of the travelers, however diversified their opinions and their fortunes, they all in time gladly availed themselves of these main traveled roads.

In 1910 my state suddenly came to herself on the subject of highways. A comprehensive system of roads was presented and the people approved of the plan carrying with it an appropriation of \$18,000,000. Six years later this beginning in road making was further supplemented by an additional fund of \$15,000,000; and on July 1 the state will doubtless go over the top with a \$40,000,000 bond issue for the same purpose. One of our counties, the other day, voted \$4,800,000 to build county roads in addition to the broad ribbons of concrete which are being laid down by the

state from end to end of the commonwealth. And the people—townfolk and country folk, farmers and foresters and miners, movie actors and politicians and bankers—all use the same broad highways.

Some of you are no doubt now beginning to wonder whether you may not be in the wrong meeting; or at least what the trails of '49 and the highways of today have to do with farmers and books. The point is this: People who travel on the public roads want the best roads obtainable, the safest and the smoothest and usually the most direct. So they compromise their differences, consolidate their funds and construct a system of highways, permanent, extensive, continuous; and everybody travels thereon.

When it comes to the matter of furnishing books to farmers, and farmers' wives and farmers' hired men, we are acting upon the principles I have tried to indicate as being satisfactory with highways. We do not build highways for farmers—that would be too expensive; we do not organize libraries for farmers—that would be inadequate. But we construct roads for all the people; and we are well on the way towards a library system for everybody. It is true special attention is given farmers; but then we give special attention to everybody. I will tell you about the big plan as we see it and then about some of its special applications to the country folk.

We call it the county library plan, but a more definite title would be the Cali-